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Dorothy Maeda fires questions at city and state officials last night concerning the danger of chemicals in the A-Chem Corp. building, 1322 N. Western. Toxic waste from the building flooded nearby backyards and basements after a Jan. 26 fire.

## Damaged W. Side plant hit as toxic 'time bomb'

By Michael Gillis

A damaged West Side chemical plant containing dangerous materials was labeled a "time bomb" last night by residents who demanded that local authorities clean up the hazard immediately.

Residents of the 1300 block of Artesian are upset because toxic waste from the A-Chem Corp. building, 1322 N. Western, flooded their backyards and basements after a Jan. 26 fire. They learned of the danger only last week, when an U.S. Environmental Protection Agency crew began cleaning the site.

They are also angry that more than 3,000 gallons of toxic waste are still inside the fire-damaged building.

"Why was the community not informed right away?" demanded Dorothy Maeda, 64. "Why wasn't it cleaned

up further? All these people, all these city, state and federal agencies knew about this, but not one time did they tell us about it."

Representatives of the Chicago Fire Department, the Metropolitan Sanitary District, the EPA, the Chicago Health Department and the Illinois attorney general's office attended the meeting at Sure Foundation Church, 1300 N. Artesian.

Stephen Browning, the EPA official overseeing the cleanup, said the agency removed the waste from around the building within a week after the fire by flushing it down sewer lines.

The owner of A-Chem, John D. Pauga, agreed to clean the site, but the cleanup was delayed because of Pauga's death shortly after the fire, Browning said.

Residents told him there were still traces of the waste, a green-yellow liquid con-

taining corrosive hydroxides and acids.

Anna Rodriguez, 46, said she has health problems because of the liquid in her basement. "When I go down there my throat gets really dry and my eyes get watery," she said. "My doctor told me I should move out of the house."

The residents also complained about the building not having been cleaned.

The EPA realized that the building had not been cleaned and sent crews there after a second fire June 3. The building is now boarded up, and a 24-hour guard has been posted.

The plant will be destroyed after the cleanup. Supervising Municipal Judge Frank Sulewski ordered the demolition during an emergency hearing last Friday, calling the plant "extremely dangerous, hazardous and unsafe."